

118 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*

604 that the wife of a maternal uncle may likewise claim his nephew as "son-in-law."¹

BROTHERS-IN-LAW AND SISTERS-IN-LAW

607 The mutual regard between brother and sister is said to have been reflected not only through the carrying out of the obligations of the avunculate and amitate in the spirit of "showing how much brothers and sisters thought of each other." It could also be seen in the type of behavior expected between brothers-in-law on the one hand, and sisters-in-law on the other. Brothers-in-law were generous to each other and could joke lightly with each other, but nothing even remotely connected with sex could be so much as mentioned in each other's presence. A man was circumspect in regard to his sister's husband out of respect for his sister, and to his wife's brother because the latter, out of respect for his own sister, had similar obligations toward him. Sisters-in-law behaved toward each other in like fashion. These attitudes were extended to include wife's brother's wife as "sister," rather than "sister-in-law," and husband's sister's husband as "brother."

Unmarried brothers of a man and wife likewise regarded themselves as brothers-in-law. A case which well illustrates the attitudes between them is the following as told by The Boy. "My older brother was married to Thick's older sister and we two young unmarried brothers-in-law experienced a most embarrassing situation. One of us was visiting a woman at night and the other came to the same woman, not realizing in the dark that his brother-in-law was already there. We recognized each other's voices, however, and the one who arrived last beat a hasty retreat. The matter has never, even to this day, been discussed nor so much as indirectly alluded to between us, and the embarrassment over this event led us to avoid each other for a considerable time thereafter. Eventually our relationship was deepened inasmuch as Thick married my sister. Even though my sister should die, Thick and I would continue to be brothers-in-law on the same plane."

[601] ¹ Kroeber, 1902, p. 10, calls attention to the identity of terms for "niece" and "daughter-in-law." Apparently a woman used the term "son-in-law" for her niece's husband or for her husband's nephew only if presents were given.

128 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*

842-thers wash such clothes and wear them again right after delivery—and they have a lot more babies now than they used to have, too.”

[163] Coming Daylight said that formerly most women had only two or three children,—at most five,—and that some had none at all. Yet in the “old days” the population was large. Singer mentioned that although a man with several wives might have one as favorite, this would not make any difference. Each wife would have one or two children; no one of them would have a great many.¹

These two old women, and our older men informants as well, were firmly convinced that “medicinal” contraceptives accounted for the small families. The old woman said: “Lots of women took medicine. There are roots for that [contraception]. Women who do not want children say, as an excuse, that one cannot keep things in order if there are children about. Not everybody had this kind of medicine, and one had to pay a high price for it—sometimes two or three horses. If a man were the owner of this type of medicine, he might demand in payment one of the other wives of the husband who obtained the medicine from him. If you take this kind of medicine you have to abide by certain rules. You must not let anyone who has children wear your robe; never sit on the bare ground; never hold an infant; don’t sit on anyone’s else bedding; above all, don’t have intercourse with anyone other than your husband. If you break any of these rules you will conceive right away.”

● [837] To illustrate this point, one woman told about her cousin’s wife who had taken medicine to prevent her having children. While her husband was away, she “threw in” with another man and became pregnant. Some women hesitated to take this kind of medicine because if a woman then became pregnant her husband would suspect infidelity, even though the wife had remained chaste but had “broken one of the other rules.” Singer said that she would

[145] ¹ This is confirmed by Denig, who was among the northern plains tribes for 20 years and was himself married to an Assiniboine. He makes the following observations, p. 513: (1) Not more than two out of five children live till youth is passed; (2) two to five children is the average and seven or eight of rare occurrence; (3) a woman is old at 35 and seldom healthy, menopause occurs at 40 or earlier, the usual period of child-bearing is 18 to 35, although a few start bearing at 15.

190 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*

595 suffered injustice, but they insisted that the disciplinary power of
562 the husband "made good wives of many women." In spite of the
fact that many cases were given in illustration of harsh treatment,
not a few were mentioned in which husband and wife lived happily
together in an atmosphere of mutual esteem and deep affection.
Coming Daylight herself, for instance, experienced what could be
considered an ideal marriage with her first husband, Dressed in White.

EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIRS

837 Girls were instructed before marriage to expect and condone
infidelity on the part of the husband. An ambivalent attitude prevailed
in that a man's reputation was said to have suffered if he were
known as one who was "always fooling around with other men's
wives"; yet brave young men were expected to make as many
conquests as possible.

There were few women who escaped their husband's suspicion at
one time or another. The reasons why the suspicion was often
justified were given by Singer to have been the following. "Too
often young girls were given in marriage to old men for whom
they did not care and to whom they never got attached; so when
younger men more to their liking came along, lots of these girls
gave in to them and took chances of getting caught by their
husbands. But even if a woman liked her husband and he was
real good to her, when she saw that he was running around with
other women, she might be jealous and want to 'make her life
bad' just to get even with him."

While a woman could not count on her mother, or aunt, or
sister-in-law to help along her illicit love affair, in some cases a
grandmother, or sister, or friend might assist her in making
assignments with the lover and would do their best to shield her
from her husband. It was said that others were sympathetic
especially if the lover were known as a brave man. In fact there
were two sets of circumstances in which public opinion was
lenient almost to the point of approval, although great discretion
was necessary to avoid the husband's suspicion, since he still
had the right of punishing his wife if he found her out. One
kind of situation concerned the woman who sent a man out to
accomplish some specific

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

Marriage

191

and spectacular war deed before she granted her favors to him.⁹ 837
If he returned, she was supposed to keep her word, accepting him
as her lover. In the other type of situation, it was taken for
granted that a woman would succumb to the pleas of a man who
had publicly announced his intention of virtually committing
suicide. Such a man, by singing the "brave-song" as he circled
the camp, indicated that he would seize the first opportunity there-
after to encounter the enemy but make no effort to defend
himself.¹⁰ [762] [533] [726] 1

According to a number of stories that are told, it was not un-
common that a woman committed suicide when her lover failed
to return from war. That this actually happened, in some cases
at least, is vouched for by the following factual account given by
Singer. "White people, on one occasion, invited some Gros Ven-
tres to visit them. All of the people, whose lodges were near to
that of my grandmother, went, except one woman. This woman
was scraping a skin when word was announced that a certain
young man had been killed at war. My grandmother, noticing that
the sound of scraping had stopped, thought that this woman was
resting, and after a little while started over to visit her. On the
way, however, she heard a shot, and when she got to that lodge
she found that this woman was dead. She had first dressed her-
self nicely in her best clothes and had then shot herself, pulling the
trigger of the gun by means of a string attached to her toe. My
grandmother had suspected an affair between this woman and the
young man who had lost his life at war, but she hadn't known for
sure until this woman committed suicide. In those days a woman
would have kept such an affair secret. (Now since women have
the law to protect them from their husbands, wives just don't care
and boldly run around with anybody they fancy and talk back to
their husbands, and everybody knows all about it.) But anyway,
that woman was a good worker,—she was working for her hus-
band when that bad news came about the death of her lover,—and
of course her husband mourned for her." 637 762

It was said that women who had been cast aside by their hus- 637

⁹ "This custom is said to have led to the death of many young men," 578
Kroeber, 1908, p. 180.

¹⁰ For further details on the "brave-song," see p. 92.

192 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*837
578

bands, and whose families were indifferent to their conduct, were easy conquests for men, but sometimes caused a great deal of trouble. A woman like that usually had more difficulty in acquiring a good husband, and was jealous if her lover refused to take her as wife, yet married some other woman. Coming Daylight had an experience with one such woman. "My husband and I were living in a lodge with his mother and her husband and his two brothers, really cousins. My husband was a very handsome man and shortly after we were married, a woman whose lover he had been, came to that lodge and tried to get him to marry her too. When I saw that she was running after him I told him: 'You ought to take that woman. I can just make my bed on the other side of the fire [with the two cousins]!' But, knowing that she was the promiscuous kind, he didn't want her and refused her. She made her bed in our lodge anyway though and kept after him, but still he wouldn't have her. His mother told him one day: 'You might just as well marry her because she is a good worker and besides she had friends among the whites, so we could all eat!' My husband got mad then and told his mother what he thought of his former sweetheart. He even threatened to go off to war again if she didn't go away. The woman was right outside the lodge and heard what they said about her. She was so furious that she rushed in and dragged me out feet first so that all my clothes went up over my head. When I got up, she grabbed at my ear and pulled off my ear-ring—you can still see where she tore the flesh. Then she ran in the lodge again and started pounding on my husband. Finally, one of those unmarried relatives, who was not as particular as my husband, told her: 'Well, take your things over to that other lodge and I will move my things over there too.' So they lived as man and wife. I never tried to hit back at that woman and I didn't even talk about her, but I got even with her in a quiet way. One night at a dance, I took my husband by the arm and told him to dance with her. When she said: 'Oh, I have no use for him now—he is old,' I said in a loud voice: 'You would change your mind quick enough if I had asked him to sleep with you!' And everybody laughed and laughed at that woman because they knew how anxious she had been to have him."

837

It was said that when virtuous women refused improper ad-

It was said that when ^{Marriage} virtuous women refused improper advances, some men overcame their resistance by threat of using love charms or witchcraft against them. There was one man, for instance, described as having been handsome, but who was said to have gotten his way with many women by intimidating them. Coming Daylight said: "One day that man approached me saying: 'If you don't let me have you, your life will be short.' I told him: 'Well, you better take a gun and finish me right now. Maybe that would make you feel good.' I called his bluff, but nothing ever happened to me."

Other men were said to have resorted to trickery and actually deceived women whom they could not get by approaching them openly. There was one individual, for example, a contemporary of Coming Daylight and Singer, who had a well-deserved reputation for "getting the better of women" whose husbands were away from camp. Singer told the following story as typical of the kind of thing this man did. "One certain night this man went to a lodge and crept in beside a woman whose husband was away on a war party. He whispered to her, pretending to be her husband: 'I came home ahead of the others. They don't know it.' Then he added: 'Put our little girl on the other side of the lodge.' The woman did as he told her and they laid together. After a while he asked her: 'How are the children?' But this time she remarked: 'Your voice sounds different.' He allayed her suspicions, however, by saying that he had caught a bad cold. He then quickly made his escape by claiming that he would have to get back to his comrades before they would awaken in order to avoid paying a fine should they discover he had come into camp ahead of the rest of the war party. So in the morning this woman told her mother and her mother-in-law that the war party was returning that day. She went out singing war songs so that everyone in the camp heard her. But after a while, when the war party failed to come in, the people realized that some man must have deceived her. It was later found out who he was and this man's name is used at the present time to indicate any man who tricks a woman into believing he is someone for whom she had been waiting."

There was a considerable discussion of whether or not it had been a Gros Ventre custom in the past to periodically have a public confession of chastity by women. Coming Daylight, Singer,

194 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life*

837 and the younger women as well, all emphatically maintained that the practice was a Piegan one and not Gros Ventre. On the other hand, The Boy claimed that it was a Gros Ventre practice in his father's time, which extends further back than the actual experience of Singer and Coming Daylight. Mary's statement throws some light on the attitudes in the very recent past. "I have heard that the Piegans did that. My mother-in-law lived among them a long time and told me what their life was like. Once a man here wanted to try that public type of confession. He told everybody: 'We are going to have a big gathering to show off some of our Gros Ventre women. Now remember that this is a sacred thing and you have to swear to it. You don't dare get up there and lie, because if you do you will have bad luck.' I went to that party, but that part of the proceedings didn't come off. Someone had said to the man who was running it: 'You don't want to start this thing because it will cause a lot of trouble.' I guess that is why the host didn't go through with it, although he had the prize—a big quarter of beef—all ready to be given to the one who could honestly make that claim."

In commenting on what Mary had said, Singer and Coming Daylight gave two reasons why this public confession of chastity could not have been a Gros Ventre custom, and would have not been feasible in their day. First, in a gathering of that kind there would have been too many relatives before whom a woman had to be "ashamed"—brothers, cousins, uncles and father; therefore if a woman could justly claim to be chaste she couldn't have gotten up in public and said so. Secondly, it would have exposed too many women; every husband whose wife could not rise to the occasion would have been embarrassed and there would have been too much suspicion and jealousy engendered.

[171] This of course does not disprove the point made by The Boy that the public confession of chastity was in the more remote past a Gros Ventre as well as a Piegan custom, but it does imply that such a ceremony was in all likelihood not held by the Gros Ventres subsequently to 1855 or thereabouts.¹¹

¹¹ Clark, who visited the Fort Belknap Agency for a few days in 1881 mentions, p. 198, that among other dances they have a Strong Dance for women,—intended as a support to their chastity.

793 although without the wild parsley, but we did not obtain details.

*796 After ritual treatment of their wearing apparel, the new keeper and co-keeper had to take off any ring, necklace or other personal adornment made of copper, iron or other metal, as the wearing of metal adornments was forbidden them, apparently because such were from the whites. The two, but not the Pipe child, were each

[784] ritually invested with a necklace consisting of a large single shell on a string of twisted, not plaited, buckskin. The investiture was done with three motions as if putting the necklace on, and at the third it was actually put on. Further the keeper, but not the co-keeper, had to frame his hair over his forehead with a large pompadour, as a sign of distinction.¹

The new co-keeper also put some dried peppermint leaves mixed with poisonous wild parsley in a little buckskin sack which she then wore on her belt. This had a double purpose. First, the mixture being poisonous, she commanded respect. She must not be molested or even be bodily touched. Whoever molested or even touched her would suffer fits or spasms or a paralytic stroke. Second, she must live a virtuous life and not run around with other men. The co-keeper and keeper, as also the ex-co-keepers and ex-keepers, since they had all been consecrated with peppermint and fumigation could handle the wild parsley without danger, but the common people were not immune to its supposedly highly toxic effects.

On this second day a big feast was given. Most of the food was provided by the new keeper and his relatives. That eaten by the new keeper and co-keeper, who had been fasting from food and water since the time they were first siezed a good thirty or more hours previously, was provided by the ex-keepers.

At sundown the day's instruction ended. That night the new keeper and co-keeper, the ex-keepers and ex-co-keepers and two attendants slept in the double lodge, where the Pipe also remained.

Very early the next morning (or less probably late on the

¹ In 1948 The Boy added: "When a man became keeper, he ceased to comb his hair and it would get in all kinds of shapes and hang down. So he would take a bunch from the center and wind it round and round and tied that knot of hair around with a string. Whenever the keeper took off that string the people would be afraid!" [R.F.]

212 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

*796 all ate plenty. Both the dancers and the grandfathers, and the latter's helpers, brought food. When the grandfathers brought food each would say to his respective grandson or team of two to four grandsons: "All right, my grandson(s), here is your milk." The grandsons or one of them would then get up, give the exclamation of thanks (according to Coming Daylight), and would kiss the "grandfather" and would "nurse."

In the course of the Crazy Dance, as at most other social and ritual large gatherings, it was customary for relatives of the dancers to give away presents in their honor, not to the dancers themselves, but to third parties.¹⁰

According to The Boy, a sweat-lodge rite was held in connection with the Crazy Dance, but we obtained no details. Presumably it followed the general pattern of the rite as carried out for the sacred Pipes.

*796
195 "Talking backward" was characteristic of the dancers' behavior during the day or days immediately following the four day rite, but also, according to our informants, during the four-day rite itself. If the dancer said "Hit me real hard," he would be barely touched; if he said, "Don't hit me hard," he would be hit very hard. "Go away" meant "Come here"; and vice versa. An answer "yes" meant "no." "Raise it up," meant "Lower it down." "All right," a dancer would say "you fellows will not dance"; then he would sing and they would dance.

*796
●837 The sex-test calls for more extensive explanation. It was a major, in a sense the major, feature of the Crazy Dance, the "sacrifice" about which the dance centered. The dancers were in a sense "throwing away," offering as a quasi-sacrifice, their wives or substitute women. In the sacred Pipe rites, the costly offerings were in material things, sacrifices in the strict sense of the term, in the Sacrifice Dance, the main offerings were the physical sufferings of the participants, "sacrifices" in an extended sense of the term; in the Crazy Dance, the "sacrifice" consisted more in the mental suffering of the dancers who submitted their wives or substitute women to a severe sex-test, a test which at best brought acute anxiety and embarrassment to all concerned. From the

¹⁰ For example, see Flannery, 1953, p. 108.

The Sacred Dances

213

content,—the announcement and other prayers,—it seems fairly clear that the "sacrifice" by the Crazy Dance chief vower and his associates was offered to the Supreme Being. 796*
837●

Just on what night or nights in the rite the test or tests took place was a point we did not clear up. Information regarding the form of this test was not revealed by elders to children, and actual happenings when given grandfathers and granddaughters were alone were commonly kept more or less secret by the two parties concerned, though the facts might leak out and founded or unfounded rumors were apparently often topics of gossip. The test itself took the following form.

Late at night the crier would go around the camp and bid all the people to go inside and shut their lodges and stay in, and not even stick their heads out because the grandfathers were going to come out. Anybody who disobeyed this order would be chased, caught, made to dance, kicked, and apparently hit with cactus-armed sticks. When all was quiet and all the people were indoors, the ceremonial grandfathers would go out beyond the camp circle, halting four times on the way, and would sit down in the dark scattered here and there, each a distance from the others. The men dancers stayed in camp, in the Crazy Dance lodge, and "sang brave songs" until their wives returned. Their wives or substitute women,—whether one for each individual dancer or successively one for each team of two to four is not clear—then went out to the grandfathers, one woman to each respective grandfather. The women were naked, except for a blanket or robe covering their bodies and leaving only their heads sticking out. Each carried with her a filled common pipe.

If at the last moment a dancer would not allow his wife to go out and meet his and her grandfather, or if she failed to do so, or if after going out she did not submit to the body-to-body test, the fact would be published and tongues would wag, and there might be other consequences. On one occasion, the story runs, among the women going out to the grandfathers was a pretty one who had a lover. The lover intercepted her on her way out, took her home, and eloped with her. He died soon after, his body having just shriveled and wasted away. On another occasion, a certain woman,

214 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

*796 a noted singer well known to Coming Daylight, appears to have declined to submit, after she had gone out, to the body-to-body test, or at least to have resisted advances. On the way out she was heard to say: "Oh, I won't have this old man just for this little root [see *infra*]. If I wanted to own some medicine I could go and dig it out of the ground."

●837

Each woman, when she had located her particular grandfather in the dark, would say: "Here, my grandfather, is a pipe." The grandfather would act as if hesitating to accept. He would not accept it right away. After he finally had accepted it, he would rub his palms on the ground and rub the pipe itself, "sort of cleansing it." Then he would pray with the pipe to the Supreme Being, for the woman, after which he smoked it alone. Then he rubbed his hands again on the ground and "felt (rubbed?) her all over, and cleansed her body."

After this she would lie down on the ground, supine and naked, and the "grandfather," likewise naked, would lie on her. In this position the ritual grandfather who had been chewing the powdered blackish medicine or sacred root, of a plant (unidentifiable by us) growing in the Rocky Mountains and not found in Gros Ventre territory proper, touched his lips to hers, and passed the chewed root from his mouth to hers. All this, as Coming Daylight put it, was considered "something holy" and "no sin whatever." Either the act or the root or both—we did not clear up this point—was supposed to impart what she called "life everlasting" (she probably meant "long life") to the woman. This root was chewed by the Crazy Dancers.

[786] The ritual code which prescribed this body-to-body ceremony for the wife and her ceremonial grandfather, at the same time rigidly prescribed sexual intercourse between them. By code, the ceremony was not ritual license but on the contrary a test, one set for the husband, the wife, and the ritual grandfather. "The husband," as The Boy put it, "was sending his wife to his ceremonial grandfather and giving her to him. It was figurative. It was giving but it [intercourse] was not supposed to happen but if it did, well it just did." As Mathilda Cuts-the-rope expressed it, "the test was for the husband to allow his wife to go out with the grandfather."

The Sacred Dances

215

The husband would have to be a man of strong heart." The husband would be gravely anxious, and in a sense deeply embarrassed and humiliated, but could not show temper or "get mad"; "he would however have gotten mad," said Coming Daylight, "if his wife actually had had intercourse with the grandfather."

796*
837●

The character test of the wife and grandfather was equally severe or even more so, but was, as is obvious, of a different nature. "These women [the wives or substitutes]," The Boy commented, "were usually young women, just enjoying life to the fullest measure. They were of that age, and to make the test more severe their husbands kept away from them before it so that the temptation would be greater, more intense. And the 'grandfathers' were not harmless old men." Apropos of this test, The Boy remarked: "It was known by the Gros Ventres that the female sex is the weaker one, but in such matters it is the stronger one . . . of old the Gros Ventres held this [sex] a great weakness of mankind."

Penalties for failure in the sex-test were either supernatural or social or both. One ritual grandfather, who on one occasion could not stand the test and who had intercourse with his granddaughter, was found dead in his bed before four nights had passed. If the couple succumbed, the fact was very apt to become known. "The woman," said The Boy, "would sometimes tell, or else the couple would give themselves away afterwards by their actions. . . . They would naturally brood over it [their failure]. . . . It would prey on their minds and they would blunder and make mistakes, and it would drive them downward, afraid to join in social life. People would begin to comment: 'What is the matter with these two?' The Gros Ventres were very inquisitive and would want to know what was the matter. The couple would be driven to make a confession and get it over with. Or something would happen anyway to confirm the suspicion that people had of them. . . . Even if the two were lovers, it would have been hard to do this [fail in the ritual] test and yet keep it quiet."

[684]

There was, as would under the circumstances be suspected, appreciable differences of attitude toward this feature of the Crazy Dance on the part of husbands, wives and grandfathers. Some husbands, as we have seen, would not, for jealousy or for fear of

216 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

*796 sexual mishap, join the Dance at all or permit their wives to join, even though such refusal was apt to entail a certain loss of face or status, to subject those who refused to the charge of being over-jealous weaklings, of not having "strong hearts," of not being able to take it. Most at least, perhaps all, who joined, suffered grave anxiety or humiliation or both. Some of the wives and ritual grandfathers, probably the majority, were, it is clear, very reluctant to submit themselves to the test, for fear of the penalties for failure, and, so far at least as these wives were concerned, for dislike of the anxiety, embarrassment and humiliation involved. Some other wives and grandfathers, probably a majority, were, it seems equally clear, quite the reverse of reluctant.

837 A certain air of secrecy surrounded this whole matter of the sex-test, and actual occurrences connected with it and, when the test and occurrences were talked about, they were commonly discussed in hushed tones. It was consequently very difficult for us to discover what proportion of failures occurred. The Boy seemed to think that failures were somewhat less frequent than did Coming Daylight and Singer, but all agreed that some failures did occur. Many stories and rumors ran the round of gossip. A younger, middle-aged informant, Cora Chandler, used to hear these stories. One of them, heard by Coming Daylight and told us, was that one couple said: "Let's lie here longer. There is nothing to worry about." "Some of the women," she stated, "liked it all right, but some of them didn't. . . . Some returned (from their grandfathers to their husbands) quickly and others would take a long time."

*796 842 After the test the ceremonial grandfathers and the women would get up and the latter would go back to their husbands in the Crazy Dance lodge. The attendants on watch at the door thereof would announce their arrival. Each husband would go to meet his wife who would give him back the pipe that she had taken with her and would give him the root (or some of it) that she had gotten from her grandfather. Then she went home to her lodge.

The purpose for which the root was used was not known to The Boy. To judge from a short dialogue recorded from Coming Daylight, it may have had something to do with fertility, child-

The Sacred Dances

229

things together, and making ready a kit-fox skin stuffed to look like a live kit-fox. This last was used in the dance. The Gros Ventre made a great impression on his tribe and his dance was accepted and recognized as a Sacred Dance, and a vow was made to perform it."

773
539

The Kit-fox Dance was held, like the other dances, in the summer time,—about August, so Charles Buckman thought,—and everyone was obliged to be on hand for it. Preliminaries might however begin far back in the preceding winter, particularly the painting and taking out of the joiner's wives by the ritual grandfathers. This latter preliminary phase of the dance seems, from Coming Daylight's report (infra), to have been very similar to a corresponding phase of the Crazy Dance, but we were able to secure only the following, rather vague, account of it as described by Coming Daylight:

796*

"In the Kit-fox Dance the wives had to go out with their 'grandfathers' just as in the Crazy Dance. My uncle, Crow Bull, once joined it with his Assiniboine wife, Coming Day, and it took a long time. The 'grandfathers' used to take extra long [in preparation for] for this dance and, if the [preparatory] time was winter, they made nice places, brushing the snow away, where they would lie down with their ceremonial grandfathers. The 'granddaughters' would go to their 'grandfathers' lodges and then the 'grandfathers' would take them out, and the 'grandsons' would be painted. The 'grandsons' would have so to go for a long time, from winter to spring, to their 'grandfathers,' before actually joining the dance. So Crow Bull would go with his wife to his 'grandfather's' lodge to get instructions and each time he would be painted and the 'grandfather' would take Crow Bull's wife out and brush away the snow and lie with her."

796*
837●

Besides the stuffed kit-fox skin mentioned in the origin story above, the Kit-fox Dance paraphernalia included two crooked sticks, used when dancing. These were shaped like a shepherd's crook or hockey stick, with strips of little otter skin carefully wrapped around them "all the way down" and with eagle-tail feathers tied to them here and there. The wrapping had to be done in a certain way, and only by a brave warrior. These sticks

796*
778

Curing Practices

363

band, Little Man; Drops In The Fire, a horse for curing Crow Bull; 756
Stiffarm, lots of things, horses and so forth, including "one lovely
mare," for treating—unsuccessfully—Little Man. Good Singer
received "horses, blankets and such things," for curing Singer
herself. Bull Lodge was given "the best horses" for treating Al
Chandler's uncle. All the foregoing payments were for cases of
serious illness. Mae Main stated that a person who wanted to
procure a certain contraceptive root would have to "pay a big
price for this, sometimes two or three horses."

Sometimes, how commonly or rarely it is hard to say, a medicine 837 ●
man would stipulate sex relations as his payment or part thereof. 756
Cora Chandler had heard "that some medicine men take women
afterwards as part of the payment for curing." "This," she ex-
plained, "is why Coming Daylight was afraid of that medicine man
when he was stark naked," having disrobed before starting to
treat her (supra, p. 338). "Occasionally," Thomas Main had
heard, "in very serious circumstances a man, to save the life of
a brother or of someone dear to him, would pay the fee of giving
his wife [allowing the doctor sex relations with her]."

The relative decline of native doctoring is due in part to the 177
influence of the missionaries and of the civil authorities, in part no 795
doubt to educational and other accultural factors. All the 756
Gros Ventres today are members of the Catholic Church. "Joe
Assiniboine," said Coming Daylight, "a good medicine man, still
living [in 1940: he died in 1942 or 1943], never joined the Church;
joining would take his power away from him." Stiffarm, one of
the last of the great doctors, who died in 1932, on becoming a
Catholic and later a catechist, is reported by one informant to have
renounced his doctoring powers. One reason Coming Daylight
gave for not accepting doctoring power herself was, "my children
were all Catholics and I joined the Church and I will be a good
Catholic till I die." Little Man, Al Chandler's adopted father,
wanted to pass on some of his curing power to him, but Al did
not want it, because, he said, he was afraid he would "poison
someone" but also on account of the Catholic Church. . . . "The
Catholics didn't want you to do such things."

406 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

782 Following is The Boy's account gotten from his father, Lame
837 Bull, and given to us in 1939, with slight additions, in parentheses,
from his quite similar account given us in 1945:

"This custom disappeared when Lame Bull was a small boy [hence, about 1832-35]. He remembered it distinctly, although he had seen it only once, in his early boyhood. The crier went around saying to everybody: 'Get ready everybody, after sunrise tomorrow morning, to see who is the woman most faithful to her husband.' The custom was carried out only once in a great while. A group of older men, not real old ones but those still active, would get together and agree that the test should be carried out.

"The very first thing the next morning, the crier went around and announced: 'This is meant for every married couple, old and young. Put on your best clothes. Start right away.' Then two of the biggest lodges in the camp circle were put together to make a two-lodge tent. After it was put up, the crier announced: 'Everyone come from every direction to the center-lodge.' All came, dressed up, especially the unmarried young men. (The young men before the test witnessed by Lame Bull had made it up among themselves, to get up and say publicly, 'That woman is lying,' should any woman get up and dance whom they knew to be lying about her fidelity.) (They had a brush shed at the front of the double-lodge, and the flaps of the lodge were raised so that more people could fit in and look on. The women had to sit inside. The only men inside were the singers and musicians, some standing and beating drums, others seated with their hands under the elkskin in front of them.) The singers sat in a circle with a big tanned elkskin in the middle, and each singer had two human shin-bones, one in each hand, and both shin-bones were notched saw-like with a series of notches. There were several pairs of these bones. When the singing began and the drum holders beat their drums, the bone holders sawed with the bones under the elkskin. A weird noise was made by the sawing together of these bones invisible to the onlookers.

"Before the singing began, one man got up and told the women what the affair was about and the procedure in it, so that they would understand: 'The men are going to sing four times. If not a single woman gets up and dances and uncovers the human bones

Miscellaneous Private Rites and Observances

407

under the elkskin, then there is not a woman in the entire Gros Ventre tribe who is faithful to her husband. And it would even look bad if one does exist but does not get up until the fourth singing.' Then he impressed on the women's minds that getting up and uncovering the human bones under the elkskin was like taking an oath. The older women might know that the things to be uncovered were human bones, but the younger ones might not.

"After this man was through talking, some of the older women got up and encouraged the younger women: 'Surely there ought to be one in this whole group who has been faithful to her husband. Don't fear. Be proud of the fact. Get up and dance.' When the singers started to sing [the song, number 69, was sung by The Boy and recorded by us], they started off with a bang, shouting and yelling and beating the drums fast. They sang the song once and then the second time, and then began making remarks: 'We have sung twice. There are no dancers yet. Only two more times are left.'

"They sang it the third time and still there were no dancers. A lot of the old women were now walking around and pleading with the young wives: 'Don't let this pass without at least one wife getting up.' Before the last song started, several of the leading men, too, said: 'This is the last time. If no married young woman dances and uncovers the scraping here, then not one Gros Ventre woman in the entire tribe is faithful to her husband.'

"Finally, from about the center of the crowd of sitting women, a young woman got up and stepped out, amid much applause, for she was perhaps the comeliest young woman in the tribe. She sort of tucked up her skirts on both sides under her belt and started to dance toward the drumbeating and scraping. She danced fast, vigorously, like a man. She made four rounds, and on each of the first three made a pass with her hand toward the covered scraping. The fourth time she lifted the elkskin. The singing and the scraping with the bones stopped at once.

The young woman had to pause to catch her breath, saying: 'When I catch my breath I will tell you something.' When she had caught her breath, pointing around to all the men with a sweeping gesture she said: 'Plenty of nice young men are here but not one of them knows me [in the sense of sex relations]. The only man

782

837●

408 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

782 who knows me and whom I know is my husband. But many of
837 you have tried to [seduce me] but did not succeed. Ninā:nā'ak is
listening to me and he knows I am telling the truth. Sunshine
gives the most light, and what I have to say has nothing hidden
in it. It is as true as the light of day which sunshine gives. My
husband is off on a war party and he will distinguish himself
during it, and this will be another mark that I am telling the truth.

"Then the old men and old women drowned out one another
singing her praises. All thought her a wonderful woman, being
alone at night and so beautiful and yet withstanding all advances.
Her name was Speaks Holy, and her husband's, Sun Old Man.

[524] "After the bones had been uncovered a dance was held, includ-
ing a contest between a man and a woman. A woman and a man
got up and danced toward each other, each making faces at the
other, pulling noses, and so forth. The one who laughed first lost
and was pushed back into his or her seat. The winner remained
on the floor and challenged. Another, of the opposite sex, then got
up from the side of the loser and contested with the previous
winner. And so the contest went on until one, a man or woman,
won in four successive bouts. When this happened he or she was
the winner. All the people then threw them [each successive loser?]
down and covered them up with their robes. Then there was food
and feasting and the affair ended.

"There was no prayer or smudging or other rite, except the
oath the woman took on the spot to the Supreme Being, Ninānā'āc.
The young woman in the case had taken upon herself a serious
thing. She took an oath. . . . She was glad of the opportunity to
declare her fidelity. . . .

"At the end the double lodge was torn down. Early in the morn-
ing, after the third night, the war party returned. . . . Sun Old Man
had counted coup, he had struck an enemy and had returned with
something. So his wife must have told the truth, for nothing had
been prearranged. All this added to the fury of other husbands
against their wives. The women denied and said: 'We did not
want to do this publicly. What that woman did in uncovering the
bones was just a bid for notoriety. We can be faithful without do-
ing that. We are humble.'

Miscellaneous Private Rites and Observances

409

"Lame Bull said that the old men had told him that the Gros Ventres used to hold this test once in a while, but the only one he witnessed was the one described. He also said that they were going to hold this test again when he was a middle-aged man and were all ready to do so, when a war party came back, some of whose members had been killed in battle. So that spoiled the occasion. And after that, the test was never held."

782
837

DREAMS, VISIONS AND AUDITIONS

Gros Ventre for "a dream" is *kana:tč*; for "a vision," and apparition seen while you are awake or "even while you are sleeping and somebody comes to you," *be:tān:hatsā'na*, "something sacred I saw." In the following pages we are for clarity's sake distinguishing between dreams occurring in sleep and visions and auditions occurring in waking hours. What, if any, importance the Gros Ventres themselves attached to the distinction is not clear, although they of course were fully aware of it, as is obvious from their explicit statements in the cases recorded by us. It is quite clear, however, that such dreams, visions, and auditions played a major role in their magico-religious culture, and entered into it in numerous ways and on numerous occasions. Illustrative cases will be given presently.

787

Especially in the spring time older men, after going to bed at night, would command silence in the lodge and would sing and pray, informally without ritual observances, and would pray among other things for some good dream and for deep sleep¹ so that they would not wake up before the dream was over.

Dreams in which power was offered or imparted were supposed to be kept more or less secret. Such secrecy was not, however, called for, it seems, regarding other dreams.

Dreams as recorded by us fall into two categories, those in which gifts or messages were imparted to the dreamer by some being, and those in which interpretation of the meaning of the dreams

¹The Arapaho, we were told, call this kind of sleep "thick sleep." In 1948 Tom Main said that the literal translation of the Gros Ventre word for "deep sleep" is actually "thick sleep." [R.F.]